

SAYRE (L.A.)

Remarkable Case of Deception.

A WOMAN

PROFESSING TO

SECRETE NOTHING BUT CHARCOAL AND STONES

FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS,

ALL THE NATURAL FUNCTIONS BEING ARRESTED.

AND THE

DECEPTION UNMASKED.

By LEWIS A. SAYRE, M. D.,

OF NEW YORK.



ALBANY:

STEAM PRESS OF C. VAN BENTHUYSEN.

1863.

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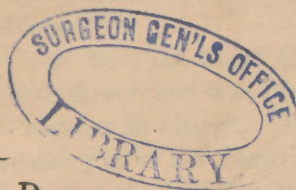
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Reprint from Transactions of Medical Society of the State of New York 1863.
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REMARKABLE CASE OF DECEPTION.

On page 192 of the Transactions of this Society, for the year 1861, is reported a "case of remarkable suppression of urine," by Dr. A. G. Purdy, of Madison county, and in the report of the case the doctor states that she has also undergone a strange transformation of her skin, on her face, left arm and left leg—they turning black like charcoal, and that her former physician, Dr. W., has seen her expectorate, while coughing, pieces resembling charcoal, and in a foot note, we are referred by our Secretary, S. D. W., to article 19, page 241, of Transaction of the Society for 1858, for cases of accidental nigrilis.

As this is the same case that was brought to the city of New York, in June last for exhibition, under the name of "the charcoal woman," and which was then exposed to be a gross deception, but has again returned to her home in Oneida, and, as I am informed by a recent letter, is going through the same system of fraud, I deem it but due to the profession and the community to expose the same. It is due to Dr. Purdy to say, that at the end of his article he states, "I cannot say that there is no deception in this case, but think the above statement substantially correct."

On the 26th of June, 1862, at the request of Rev. Dr. B., of this city, I went to see Miss Perry, at 196 Fourth street, and was there introduced to Dr. Perkins of Oneida, who had her in charge. The doctor entertained me with a long, detailed account of the remarkable phenomena which she had presented during the last fourteen years, which is entirely too tedious to narrate. He also exhibited a large box filled with pieces of charcoal, varying from an inch to three inches in length, and from one-half inch to an inch in diameter, and several pebble stones of nearly the same size, all of which he stated he had removed from her vagina at various times during the last four years.

He had, also, an ordinary prune jar nearly full of smaller specimens of charcoal about one-half an inch in length and one-quarter inch in diameter, which were apparently smoother and covered with a gum-like material, and which he stated, she had expectorated

either by coughing or vomiting during this same period. All of these specimens of coal and stones were labeled and numbered—the numbers referring to the history, date of passage, and circumstances connected therewith, which was recorded with great accuracy in a very large book which he had for that purpose; and the accuracy of each was testified to by a number of highly respectable names, many of them lawyers, clergymen, judges, merchants and others, among whom I regret to say were some physicians.

This book, he stated, was the most remarkable work ever written. He was very anxious to ascertain whether any medical man could give a proper solution of the case, as up to the present time it had baffled the skill of all who examined it. He stated that the phenomena had been developing for the last fourteen years; for the last four years she had been under his personal supervision, and had been most carefully watched by himself or others, and during this period she had not passed one drop of water, or a particle of fœces—in fact, that she had neither bladder nor rectum, both these organs terminating in the vagina—that all she ate or drank either exuded from her skin, in the form of thick blood, which dried in scales, like coal, on her face and the left side of her body, or was removed in large pieces such as I have described, from the vagina every few weeks, attended with the greatest pain. The scales from her face and extremities would sometimes fall off leaving the skin apparently healthy underneath, but in a few weeks or months would be re-formed.

I was then taken into an adjoining room, where I found the patient lying in bed, presenting an appearance, of which this oil painting (see lithograph) is an exact representation, it having been taken for the purpose of engraving, as a frontispiece to the work which was to be published previous to the exhibition of the woman, which was soon to take place.

Her pulse was natural, but feeble. A close investigation of the mask, around the mouth, showed me that it was not attached to the skin—was not an exudation from it, and I thought by being cut loose from its attachments to the hair, and the band which was placed around her forehead, could have been easily removed; and on feeling it I was convinced that my opinion was correct, but she immediately went into hysterical convulsions, and gave low, muttering complaints, as if suffering great pain.

Upon examining her left arm I found it encased in the same black material as her face, from just below the shoulder to the wrist. The arm at each extremity of the black casing, had a few turns of a bandage around it, which the doctor would not permit me to remove.

The left leg was covered from just above the knee, down, with the same material, completely encasing the foot, but I observed a crack in the casing near the ankle, over the instep, through which I could discover the skin, which had been made by bending the foot. Intentionally diverting the attention of the Dr. and others present, by some desultory conversation, I quietly put my scissors in this fissure and carefully cut out a small section, (which you here see,) without detection, and I could distinctly see the skin below perfectly healthy.

Upon examining the specimen when I left the house, in the presence of the clergyman and a niece of the patient, it proved to be made of cotton and gum, covered with some black substance, and they were at once convinced of the deception which had been practiced. Her other relatives, however, would not be convinced, even by the inspection of the piece which I removed, but were so satisfied that I was in error, that they positively insisted that I should see her the following day, in company with some of the first medical men of the city, who were to meet in consultation upon the case.

I consequently did so, and met Drs. Mott, Parker, James R. Wood, Barker, Flint, Jr., Watts, Jacobi, Livingstone, Carnochan and Mott, Jr., when the same specimens were exhibited which I have before described, and the same story narrated; almost verbatim, which was told me the day before.

The patient was found lying in bed, as I had before seen her, but the mask had been removed from the face. The Dr. stated that it had always come off in this manner in the night, but he would not show us any of the specimens. The leg and arm were the same as on the previous day. The patient appeared to writhe in agony, which the Dr. stated was owing to the fact that she was about to have a piece of the coal then pass her, and we were very fortunate in being just in time to witness the correctness of his previous statements. A number of gentlemen examined the vagina and ascertained that some hard substance was it, after which Dr. Perkins removed a piece of coal, which is here seen (exhibiting the specimen). We were then asked our several opinions regarding an explanation of this wonderful phenomenon. When my opinion was asked, I stated that the whole affair was a gross deception, that the Dr. was a swindling rascal, and that he knew it; that it was a case of nymphomania, and that he had taken advantage of the woman's infirmity, and that the cuticle on the face and extremities was of artificial production, in proof of which I exhibited the specimen which I had already cut off. I was requested to remove the remain-

ing portions of the cuticle, and with the assistance of the gentlemen present, she was completely barked of her artificial covering, which proved to be cotton cloth and a gum, covered with some black substance, a pot of which was discovered in the Doctor's box, which appeared to be petroleum, which is here seen.

Every one present was so satisfied of the gross deception, that we thought there would be no further attempt to carry on the swindle; but nothing daunted, some of the relatives and friends called upon me the following day, to persuade me that I was in error, and I was requested to meet Dr. Mott, for a more thorough investigation of the case.

I consented to do so upon the condition that I should be allowed to examine her, under chloroform, and without interference. This being granted, I took Dr. Prince to administer the chloroform, and met Dr. Mott at the hour appointed.

Doctor Perkins seemed highly indignant at the insult I had offered him the day before, and he had no doubt I would find that more charcoal had been secreted, which would convince me of my error; if so, he should expect me to apologize to him for the language I had used the day before.

She refused to take chloroform, and I therefore made the examination without it, when I found the vagina tightly packed with these specimens, (which were shown) which were removed with some difficulty, the parts being exceedingly dry and contracted.

The Dr. was again asked by Dr. Mott whether there was any rectum, which he answered in the negative, but my finger in the meantime passed into it, which proved the contrary. The catheter was then passed into the bladder and an ounce of urine was drawn off, in the presence of all, which was the *first* convincing proof to her relatives and friends, that a swindle had been practiced upon them. But the Dr., with an audacity unparalleled, coolly asked if we did not consider the secretion of so small a quantity of urine, during the period of four years, in itself a most remarkable phenomenon, making the case one of most wonderful interest.

The indignation of the friends, present at the time, knew no bounds, and the Doctor being threatened with arrest as an impostor, suddenly left the room, removing with him his large book and box of specimens, which I was afterwards unable to find.

I removed the patient to Bellevue Hospital, put her under the charge of Drs. Shaw and Pryer, with strict injunctions to cut off all communication with her friends and have her carefully watched, so that no charcoal could be obtained from any source, and to be fed upon a vegetable diet.

The following morning I observed the floor, by the side of the bed, was damp for a considerable space, as though a bowl of water had been spilled the night before. She stated she had not passed any water, and did not wish to at the time, but finding her bladder distended, I inserted a catheter, very much against her will, and withdrew nearly a quart of urine, in the presence of Drs. Shaw, Pryer and Hinchborn. A patient in an adjoining bed, informed me that early in the night he had observed her sliding towards the edge of the bed and while lying in that position, had urinated upon the floor.

The following visit, the bladder being again distended, I attempted to use the instrument, when she became very much excited, seized the catheter out of my hand and inserted it herself, with as much dexterity as the most skillful surgeon, showing that she had had practice in the operation. A dose of oil was administered to her, which operated properly, and from this time out, during the two weeks she remained in the hospital, all natural functions were properly performed. The appetite was good and her general health as good as could be expected in one of her sedentary habits. Shortly before leaving the hospital she asked Dr. Shaw, the house surgeon, "what he would think if this singular disease should return a few weeks after she got home," which convinced me that she intended again to attempt the deception.

I understand, by a recent letter, that she has been successful and she is now under the charge of a Dr. Fitch and a committee of ladies, who are carefully narrating all the marvelous phenomena which are being exhibited, and it is to prevent this imposition from being palmed off on the public that I have made this exposition.

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